CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.838
20 January 2000

Original: ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 20 January 2000, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Harald Kreid (Austria)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 838th plenary meeting of the Conference.

On my list of speakers for today I have the representatives of Ireland and Argentina. I call on Ambassador Anne Anderson.

Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland): Mr. President, might I first offer you very warm congratulations on assuming the presidency and wish you the very best of luck for your term in office?

It is now some months since I had the pleasure of speaking to the Conference on the occasion of Ireland's admission, along with four other candidates, to this body. At the time I described our determination to be admitted to the Conference as an act of faith in its future. We are still believers. But the continuing stalemate within the Conference and the difficult international context within which it is seeking to operate must give us cause for concern.

The Conference sent a report to last year's General Assembly which was devoid of substance save where it noted the admission of five new members. Welcome news for us, but cold comfort to those who expect more of this body.

It has become something of a cliché to refer to the new year bringing fresh resolve to proceed with difficult challenges. In fact, there is little that is new about our situation. The most important task of this Conference remains what it has been all along: the negotiation of significant multilateral instruments of disarmament with universal application.

The past year has not been a good one. It brought a severe setback to the prospects for ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. It also saw deeply unhelpful developments in terms of stalled bilateral negotiations towards reductions in nuclear arsenals, increased regional tensions and rivalries, and plans for national missile defence. The ABM Treaty, which the United Nations Secretary-General described in his message to us this week as a cornerstone of strategic stability, is under challenge.

Time and time again we, along with others, have said that paralysis is not a viable option for this body. If the Conference on Disarmament over a prolonged period proves itself incapable of offering a valid forum for the negotiation of real disarmament measures - and it is nuclear disarmament which lies at the heart of our difficulties - then those who wish to see progress cannot be blamed for looking elsewhere. And those who do not wish to see such progress will conclude that they are free of pressure to restrain development in the field of nuclear weapons. In such a context, the essential balances of the NPT - in effect, a bargain between those who possess nuclear weapons and those who do not - are increasingly put at risk.

The three elements around which our discourse circles again and again are: nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and FMCT. I would like briefly to restate Ireland's position on each of the three.

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

Our view, which we have stated here a number of times and which we know to be widely shared, is that the CD should without delay establish a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament. As to the mandate of such a body, we believe it should permit the Conference to deal with issues which are relevant to the consideration of future multilateral efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament and inform bilateral efforts in that direction.

Without such an entity, the CD cannot argue that it is dealing with the most serious threats to international security. And if it is not dealing with these threats, the CD loses its claim to be carrying out the role assigned to it within the United Nations system.

Ireland also agrees that the CD should embark on negotiations on the non-weaponization of outer space. We note there was wide support for the launching of negotiations and for proposals placed on the table in 1999; if there is a collective readiness to show flexibility, progress here is surely within our grasp.

We have never accepted the view that, because differences on the best route to nuclear disarmament are profound, then progress on practical measures to limit their availability are futile or must wait their turn. Notwithstanding the disturbing fate thus far of the CTBT, we must begin to work towards the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty.

An FMCT would form one of a nexus of instruments providing a basis for disarmament in the nuclear field. Many issues which are highly relevant to a commitment to disarmament would inevitably arise in the course of the negotiation. Indeed, the measure of the success of the negotiation would be the extent to which it would tilt the international balance in favour of the elimination of nuclear weapons.

We do not claim too much for an FMCT. Such a treaty is no more than a sign of serious intent towards disarmament. But it is an important part of the wider effort. And it is particularly important to those of us who respect our obligations under the NPT not to produce such material.

While the CD endlessly debates, worrying developments are taking place. Stockpiles of fissile material are already too large. While stocks are being reduced in some quarters, new production is in evidence elsewhere. It is obvious that the window of opportunity to make a meaningful attempt to curb the development of fissile material will not remain open for ever.

The Conference must find an accommodation between these three elements which will permit us to break the deadlock. The outgoing President indicated at our last session that no delegation had professed anything other than a readiness to go forward. The next weeks will show whether we are actually prepared to give substance to our words.

Our work in this Conference has an important bearing on the atmosphere in which the NPT Review Conference takes place in New York in April. It would be wrong to suggest that failure here will mean failure to reach agreement among the States parties in New York. But it would be equally wrong to suggest that only after success in New York can we hope to see success in this Conference. The truth is that each failure in the process of seeking disarmament

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

in nuclear weapons, of which this Conference is part, raises the stakes for the next effort, and creates pressures which are only rarely productive. The Conference will ill serve the New York review by remaining deadlocked, just as failure there would ill serve our efforts in Geneva.

My authorities attach very great importance to multilateral disarmament efforts and are unwilling to remain inactive in the face of stalemate. Ireland was one of 60 co-sponsors this year of a resolution in the General Assembly which called for a new agenda in seeking nuclear disarmament. None of us can afford complacency in the face of the lack of progress between the nuclear-weapons States in nuclear arms reductions negotiations, when the legal underpinnings of fragile strategic stability are being undermined, when so little is proving possible in terms of multilateral negotiation. Our efforts here remain a test of the will of the international community to re-establish momentum towards genuine nuclear disarmament.

We are fully conscious that the Conference on Disarmament remains the appropriate forum for multilateral negotiation of instruments of disarmament. That is why we so much wished to join and why we will continue to urge a further expansion in membership and a renewed vigour in Conference activity.

But appreciative as we are of membership, we are wary of succumbing to an insider's mentality - a sense of déjà vu that blunts the impatience for progress. Realism cannot be defined as resigning ourselves to going nowhere in this body for yet another year. On the contrary, realism is looking to what is happening in the world around us while this body procrastinates. We join you, Mr. President, in your call to us finally to get down to work.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Ireland for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

(continued in Spanish)

Now I have pleasure in giving the floor to the representative of Argentina, Ambassador Guillermo González, who will be leaving Geneva shortly to assume new important responsibilities. During his relatively short stay heading his country's mission here in Geneva, it fell to him to chair the Conference on Disarmament at a difficult time when attempts were being made to reach agreement on our programme of work. In carrying out his mandate, Ambassador González showed his diplomatic skill, and the balanced and thoughtful way in which he occupied the Chair earned him the trust and respect of all the member States of the Conference. He has the satisfaction of knowing that during his term of office the Conference admitted five new members. I am also convinced that his experience acquired in that context will be of use to him when he takes up his duties as a newly appointed member of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. I am sure that all of you will join me in conveying to him and his family our best wishes for the future. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. GONZALEZ (Argentina) (translated from Spanish): First of all, Mr. President, allow me to thank you for your complimentary remarks concerning myself and the work that I had the honour to accomplish as representative of my country in this Conference on

(Mr. González, Argentina)

Disarmament. Allow me also to convey to you my congratulations on taking the Chair of the Conference, and to extend to you our appreciation and support for the efforts that we know you will be making in order to continue to try to guide our work. I would also like to thank Ambassador Leslie Luck of Australia for the excellent work he accomplished during his term as President, and in particular to congratulate him on his unswerving optimism and willingness to seek options that will allow us to reach agreement.

Today I have to bid farewell to the Conference and to all the good colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of working as Permanent Representative of Argentina. My assignment in Geneva has been short - 16 months - but that does not mean that it was lacking in intensity, and as you yourself mentioned a few moments ago, it was during this time that I had the good fortune to occupy the Chair of the Conference on behalf of my country.

In that office I made every effort to secure agreement on the programme of work so that negotiations could start on specific subjects. I recall that at the end of my term of office I was able to identify those subjects on which all regional groups had given their agreement. At the same time I identified those other questions where differences of opinion still existed.

Today, and especially having listened carefully to Ambassador Anderson, one cannot but feel concern about the current situation. One often hears in informal conversations with colleagues that the situation regarding disarmament and non-proliferation issues is even more complicated than it was last year. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that, as external circumstances have a bearing on its work, paralysis in the activities of the Conference may be viewed in itself as a sign of the times and will have a very negative effect.

The political will of the member States of the Conference is the only instrument we have for adopting decisions, yet it is we, their representatives, who must make every possible effort to restore that will to negotiate and work together, without any preconditions.

As early as August 1999, all the regional groups had identified sufficient elements of agreement to set up ad hoc committees which would begin working on the issues of fissile material production, and on international arrangements to offer assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States. There were also elements that pointed to consensus for the appointment of special coordinators on the issues of anti-personnel mines and transparency in armaments, and for the consideration of the agenda, the membership of the Conference and how to make it work more efficiently.

At that time no agreement had been reached as to how to handle the issues of nuclear disarmament or the prevention of an arms race in outer space. On the two latter subjects, important proposals or suggestions had been made by my dear friend, the very distinguished Ambassador of Algeria, Mohamed-Salah Dembri, who preceded me in the Chair of the Conference.

Although our work is carried out in harmony with the work going on in other forums, we should not allow timetables outside this Conference to determine when or how this body adopts its decisions. At the beginning of this new session, there are elements of the programme of work

(Mr. González, Argentina)

on which decisions could be taken. As representatives of our countries entrusted with dealing with matters of disarmament and non-proliferation, we should make supreme efforts and sharpen our imaginations so that opportunities to make progress towards those objectives do not continue to be lost.

And even if our efforts might be in vain and the objective of reaching an agreement may not be achieved, it is nevertheless still true that the Conference on Disarmament is in itself a confidence-building measure, and it is a reminder that the ultimate objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation remain as valid as ever.

Despite the fact that I am leaving this Conference on Disarmament, I will continue to be in close contact with its subjects of work. It is my intention to take every opportunity that arises to contribute to progress by the international community, without differentiating between small or major subjects, towards our objectives.

As I end this brief statement, allow me to express my special thanks to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference, and Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, Deputy Secretary-General, as well as all the secretariat staff, for the constant efforts they have been making in support of one of the noblest instruments of multilateral diplomacy, the Conference on Disarmament.

Finally, I would like to bid all of you farewell, esteemed colleagues, thanking you for your invaluable support and sympathy, and to assure you of my readiness to continue working on our common tasks.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Argentina for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

(continued in English)

We have now concluded the list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? The representative of Brazil has the floor.

Mr. AMORIM (Brazil): Mr. President, first of all let me salute you and your predecessor. I know it is a bit unusual in the CD to take the floor like that, but if you will allow me just two words I think I could not pass up the occasion of the farewell by Ambassador Guillermo González without two words of my own on behalf of my country.

(continued in Spanish)

I think you spoke on behalf of all of us in mentioning the qualities and the efficient and professional way in which Ambassador González discharged his duties, including those of President of the Conference. I should like to add my voice to those comments, but in the special case of such a fraternal relationship as we have between Brazil and Argentina, a relationship which moreover carries special significance for this Conference through the example both

(Mr. Amorim, Brazil)

countries gave in their cooperation in respect of disarmament and non-proliferation, especially, but not only, in the nuclear area. I think that it is fitting to say a word just to express the hope that Ambassador González will continue his extremely important work in helping us with this cause.

Mr. ILLANES (Chile) (translated from Spanish): I wish to be associated with the words of Ambassador Amorim in saying that on Chile's side too we have greatly appreciated the course followed so successfully and so constructively by Ambassador Guillermo González and that we endorse the good wishes of this entire Conference, which have been expressed so well by you, Sir, in Spanish, in wishing Ambassador González every success in the very important position he is going to occupy now.

The PRESIDENT: If there is no other delegation asking for the floor, I would like to say a few words on the status of my efforts to come to an agreement which would permit us to proceed to the adoption of our work programme. At this point, it is of course for me - and you will understand that - impossible to draw any conclusions - and I also do not want to do it - on the chances we have of solving our problems. I only want to say that as far as I am concerned, I believe they have to be resolved rapidly. If we miss the chance within the first weeks - which by the way would correspond to our rules of procedure to adopt our work programme at the beginning of our session - if we miss this opportunity, I believe that there will be a lessening chance - for many reasons which have been mentioned by me and others - of getting this Conference to work in this session.

I am still in the process of some bilateral consultations, and if I come to the conclusion that the reactions I get from delegations are not - may I say - "completely intimidating for the presidency", I will then proceed to ask the groups to look at the proposals which we are making and to give me as soon as possible a feeling of what the members of the Conference think about these texts. I believe that this is all that I can indicate for the time being. As far as the time-frame is concerned, I do believe that we would have to move towards and into the groups already next week.

I should now like to take up for a decision the requests from Costa Rica, Greece and Qatar to participate as observers in the work of the Conference during this session without first having considered them in an informal plenary meeting. I hope that this will be an acceptable way to proceed. The requests of the States which I mentioned are contained in document CD/WP.506, which is before you. May I take it that the Conference can agree to these requests? I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: This concludes our business for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this point? I see none. The next plenary meeting of the Conference is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 27 January at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.